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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: RURAL NORTH KOREANS THANKFUL FOR U.S. MEDICAL
EQUIPMENT

REF: A. SEOUL 1513
[1](#)B. SEOUL 1556

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The CEO of an American NGO that provides humanitarian assistance to North Korea, Robert Springs, told the Ambassador on October 7 that medical equipment and generators provided to rural hospitals were being used as intended and appeared to be well maintained. Springs noted that when GRS made its most recent delivery of medical equipment, the staff publicly thanked the American people -- not the "Dear Leader." Springs saw multiple large open-air markets which he characterized as "capitalism in action." Spring argued that more USG humanitarian assistance would "build trust, which means everything." End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Springs's observations directly contradict what we have heard from senior MOFAT officials, who defend a Blue House ban on sending modern medical equipment to the North by insisting that such gear would only be used on regime elites in Pyongyang, not ordinary people in rural areas. End comment.

In the Provinces, Gratitude for American Aid

[1](#)3. (SBU) During a 10/7 meeting with the Ambassador, Global Resource Services (GRS) CEO Robert Springs provided his views on the impact of U.S. humanitarian assistance, including medical aid, in rural areas of North Korea. GRS has worked in the DPRK since 1997 and Springs has travelled to the North more than 100 times. He also serves on the steering committee of the U.S. National Committee on North Korea.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Springs related that he and his team had just come from North Korea after checking on GRS-supplied medical equipment and generators at three hospitals in Wonson, Yongbyon and a county in North Hwanghae province. In contrast to assertions by senior MOFAT officials (ref A), Springs noted that the generators and medical equipment, including ultrasounds and x-ray machines, were being used frequently by local residents and had not been moved to Pyongyang to treat elites. Springs said equipment donated previously by GRS to other rural hospitals was also being used as intended and appeared to be well maintained. According to Springs, doctors, technicians and local residents said they were especially thankful for the diesel generators because they "saved multiple lives" when unexpected blackouts occurred during surgery. Springs also noted that this year, when GRS delivered medical equipment to the rural hospitals, the staff publicly thanked the American

people for the assistance -- not the "Dear Leader."

What Market Crackdown?

15. (SBU) Echoing what we have heard from other sources (ref B), Springs said he saw multiple large open-air markets which appeared to be under no one's control. It was, he said, "capitalism in action." Springs related that the majority of the traders appeared to be young women, "probably mothers just trying to help their families." Practically everything was available, Springs said, from piles of broken glass to rice and corn.

Food Assistance

16. (SBU) Springs related that interlocutors from the Korean-American Private Exchange Society (KAPES), the DPRK counterpart for GRS and other NGOs, indicated that the North needed a lot of food aid. KAPES officials said they much preferred to work with American NGOs, which were effective, rather than the "burdensome" World Food Program (WFP).

Way Forward

17. (SBU) Springs made a strong pitch for additional USG-funded medical, educational and capacity-building projects in rural areas of North Korea, emphasizing that such assistance has a positive impact on people in the countryside. Increased exchanges and food aid would "build trust, which means everything," Springs added.

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